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AUTHOR Hungerford, Curtiss R.
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ABSTRACT

The Ehrhardt Training Seminar (E.S.T.) program is but one example of a self-help technique based on the premise that people will improve their personal lives and professional effectiveness to the extent that they can "break through the act" to discern the real self which is full of capacity and power when released from fear and constraint. Many adults feel they must downgrade the importance of acting out in accordance with consciously constructed values and objectives; however, they need to be aware of the difference between the act and the real person at all times. Individuals must operate according to both preferences and necessities of role demands. The working administrator or manager must find the balance between realism and idealism, and contribute to the positive growth of the individual and to the organization as well. (JAC)

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PREFERENCES AND NECESSITIES IN BECOMING ANYTHING

Curtiss R. Hungerford
Brigham Young University

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THE ACT AND THE REAL YOU:
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By

Curtiss R. Hungerford —

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players...
And one man in his time plays many parts...
Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act II, Sc. 7

The anomalous fact is that the theatre, so called, can flourish in barbarism, but that any drama worth speaking of can develop but in the air of civilization.

Henry James, Letter to C.E. Wheeler (April 19, 1911)

Werner Ehrhardt has built a fortune and an empire with his celebrated E.S.T. (Ehrhardt Seminar Training) programs. While his detractors (and I am among them to the extent that I see his technique to be degrading rather than enhancing to human dignity) are numerous, his followers are legion and even ecstatic in their praise.¹

His approach is based on the thesis that people will improve their personal lives and professional effectiveness to the extent that they can "break through the act" to discern the real self — which is full of capacity and

¹Carl Frederick, EST, New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1976.

Curtiss Hungerford, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Educational Administration at Brigham Young University.

power when released from the shackles of irrational fear and constraint built up over years of adaptation to outside — often well-meaning — forces such as parents, teachers, moral advisors, bosses, peers, "society," etc. Nearly the whole of the psychotherapeutic profession is in accordance with this philosophy. The thesis also abides in the popular works of Malz's Psycho-Cybernetics², Newman's Release Your Brakes³, Peale's Power of Positive Thinking⁴, Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People⁵, Kelly's Assertiveness Training⁶ and on and on.

The contribution of these ideas is helpful. For most adults continuing education appears to be more a matter of unlearning than it is learning. It involves expanding self-awareness and intelligent rewiring of the circuitry in accordance with enlightened insights into the self and fashioned in accordance with desirable goals. The trouble is that in the process we often subconsciously downgrade the importance of acting out our lives in accordance with consciously constructed objectives and values. We feel that there may be something essentially phony or insincere about the process. But isn't that exactly what we are required to do when we decide to do or become a "senator," a "superintendent" or an "engineer?" Isn't there always a period of uncertainty and discomfort about the demands of the new role into which we have put at least some intellectual commitment? Or — put another way — isn't that

²Maxwell Malz, Psycho-Cybernetics, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967.

³James Newman, Release Your Brakes, New Jersey: CBS Inc., 1977.

⁴Norman Vincent Peale, Power of Positive Thinking, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952.

⁵Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964.

⁶Colleen Kelly, Assertiveness Training, San Diego, University Associates, 1979.

exactly what we do do whether we are conscious of it or not? I think the answer is "of course." This paper urges you not to feel guilty about perfecting an act. Anybody who is anybody does. It cautions you simply to be aware of the difference between the act and the real you at all times.

The Legitimacy of the Act: Learning, Style and Power

Leavitt describes learning as the reorganization of perceptions leading to behavior change,⁷ Maslow's "self-actualized" person pursues the process of "putting it all together." The show business parlance of "getting the act together" compliments those who have done so so as to be effective, successful, etc. Alfred North Whitehead's remarkable insight into style and its relationship to power eloquently illuminates the idea:⁸

Finally there should grow the most austere of all mental qualities; I mean the sense for style...aesthetic qualities [of] attainment and restraint.... Style in its finest sense is the last acquirement of the educated mind; it is also the most useful. It pervades the whole being. [It] is the ultimate morality of the mind.

But above style and above knowledge, there is something, a vague shape like fate above the Greek gods. That something is Power. Style is the fashioning of power, the restraining of power...the power of attainment of the desired end is fundamental. The first thing is to get there. Do not bother about your style; but solve your problem, justify the ways of God to man, administer your province.

Where then does style help? In this, with style the end is attained without side issues, without raising undesirable inflammations. With style you attain your end and nothing but your end. With style the effect of your activity is calculable, and foresight is the last gift of gods to men. With style your power is increased, for your mind is not distracted with irrelevancies, and you are more likely to attain your object. Now style is the exclusive privilege of the expert. Whoever heard of the style of an amateur painter,

⁷Harold Leavitt, Managerial Psychology, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973.

⁸Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education, New York, MacMillan Co., 1957.

of the style of an amateur poet? Style is always the product of specialist study, the peculiar contribution of specialism to culture.

The writer draws attention to the principle of balance as it relates to the "act" and the "real person." Recognition of the principle aids us in avoiding disturbances associated with intrapersonal role conflicts. When we come to cultivate this sensitivity, life begins to lose its drudgery and destructive manifestations of fear; and becomes, instead, a kind of playful and joyful adventure.

Now, let's return for a moment to the world of the stage. Lawrence Olivier's Hamlet represents a rather different style (interpretation) from that of John Gielgud and Gielgud's if different from that of Robert Vaughn, Richard Burton or Richard Chamberlain. Although one prefers one or another of the styles over the others, they are all really quite good. Each actor has developed his character (act) superbly through the application of techniques acquired through intensive specialized study. The resultant fashioning and restraining of power creates the unique style of the actor. Some of this style comes through quite unintentionally, and some of it is highly contrived and consciously honed. Here again the principle of balance is illustrated in the criterion of true artistry. If the job is done well, the performance is believable, and true. At least it seems so within the context of the theatre into which we observers willingly suspend our disbelief of the play as a play in order to experience the "truth" of it. When the act "works," everyone is pleased and satisfied. When it doesn't, both the performers and observers rate the play or the acting as "bad." In other words, when it doesn't "work" it comes across as phony, bad or unbelievable.

While there is only one Hamlet there are many ways to portray him with excellence, some yet to be revealed no doubt. And think of the challenge to

the repertory player of doing Richard II on Tuesday, Falstaff on Friday in addition to Hamlet on Saturday. In the same vein there has been only one office of the American Presidency and essentially two political philosophies (Democrat and Republican) in our national history. Yet the range and diversity of personal power styles and behavior patterns within those two broad categories provides a richness that attests to the wonderful adaptive and creative capacity of man. While some may be better than others, there is room for at least as many styles in performance as there are roles to be performed. And so it is in every day life. The father, husband, executive, sportsman, lover, serious, humble, fun loving, risk-taking, cautious roles we all must or want to play attest to Shakespeare's observation that in every man there are many men.

All right, so much for that. We have thus far provided a kind of brief for the propriety and even necessity for an individual to formulate his own unique believable, true and effective character (style) to meet the demands of a chosen role. That role may be a part in a Shakespeare play, a president of a university, a director of a corporation, a superintendent of a school district, or a bishop of a church. There is room for conscious selection and management of components in the development of the character. The early stages of the development are usually extremely difficult to the actor, but with time and practice it becomes as we say, "second nature." And this "second nature" accrues as the "real self" of the actor emerges and blends in an aesthetically pleasing way into the new "character." The balance is achieved. The task is complex in that we must know ourselves (personal repertoire of skills and abilities) pretty well, know what we can and cannot do, where we are strong and weak, have a clear conception of what is expected in the role, what can be done easily and what will require more as yet unnatural aptitudes, etc. Our whole "act" then becomes involved in the tasks, situations, personalities, feelings,

attitudes, knowledge, skills of ourselves and others. It must all "fit" together in a pleasing, cohesive, and free-flowing, spontaneous way if it is to be excellent, effective, believable, true or real, and good. It has to aesthetically be pleasing to all parties in the communication network.

Role - Meaning and Effectiveness: Limits and Opportunities

The messages we give as well as those we give off are to come across in a congruent and consistent manner avoiding the fatal portrayal of dishonesty or inhumaneness. To some extent then, we may operate (perform) to some degree according to our preferences and yet also to some degree according to our perception of the necessities of the role demands. The reconciliation of these two entities is quite a trick to say the least. A second dimension of the problem becomes discernable as we face up to the need to know just when and how to play a role when conditions call for it and when to shirk it off and release the daimon⁹ that we recognize as the "real you" in "chips down" situations. The line between the preferences and the necessities is rarely clear and obvious. The risks and dangers are omnipresent and the stakes are usually high. Such an experience can be frustrating and costly at worst and adventuresome and enormously rewarding at best. Herein lies the risk-factor in any role that provides challenge, excitement and meaning.

Before I move to any general conclusions, I must address the matter of role expectations briefly in order to give credence to the value of role mastery. The issue reveals the conformity-originality conflict. The mathematical theory of communication¹⁰ provides us with the explanation that the redundancy

⁹Rollo May, Love and Will, New York: W. W. Norton, 1969

¹⁰Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1949.

(predictability) factor in any (stochastic) language system — be it verbal, non-verbal, musical, iconic — is what provides for the meaning in that system. Without redundancy in dress, mannerism, patterns of behavior, cultural traditions conventional modes and other language systems, etc. the meaning may be lost or distorted and the consequences can be immeasurable. It is simply an absolute requirement that anyone aspiring to excellence in any realm must master the rules of the language of that realm far beyond the mediocre capacity enjoyed by the majority within it (the realm). A point of some disturbance to the actor is always how much redundancy is necessary and when does it turn in on the meaning itself in a threatening or stifling way? Within the "fitting" redundancy range (a personal thing in final analysis) is plenty of room for individual style. Emerson and Tennyson had no greater access to American-English vocabulary or rules than did anyone else. Bach and Bacharach share the same scales and key signatures as do Mancini and Mendelsohn. Perhaps the conventions not only allow for distinctive genius but cause it in those who master it imaginatively! Those who understand the social mechanisms of conventional demands and necessities of dress may play with the redundancy-induced behavioral effects of tan versus black raincoats!¹¹ In the same way the perceptive professor learns that one political faux pas vis-a-vis his dean may be cancelled only by his publication of three articles in one year!

The Moral - Aesthetic Dimension

This section of the discourse concludes with a note of attention to the moral dimension already alluded to. How and when do we know when what we are doing is "right" or "wrong," "good" or "bad?" The assessment is mostly an

¹¹ John T. Molloy, Dress for Success, New York: P.H. Wyden, 1978.

intuitive act, I suppose, and relates to our intentions, feelings, senses and values. Ultimately the matter belongs in an aesthetic domain. My caution here is that we need not necessarily cave in to conventional feedback signals like being hired, promoted or fired, accepted or rejected. In the largest possible reality, these indicators are rarely adequate; nor do they often provide satisfaction to our insatiable need to know exactly where we stand, though the possibility may be there. On the other hand, these tools (like grades in school) — as primitive as they may be — are all we have. And we have some obligation to use them as wisely as we can — never endowing them with value beyond their limited nature.

The whole subject could be easily dispensed with if only we could be sure what was true. For truth is the final measure of worth in any circumstance. Yet even that preposition rests upon a kind of faith, I suppose. Can we not at least at this point, say that injustice abounds? But our dedication to its possibility should nourish our energy to support any effort, organized or not, that moves us in that direction? At least that ought to be our intention.

The Person-Situation Debate

In spite of all the academic debates over whether leadership is essentially a function of personal traits or situational components, nearly every actual or aspiring leader views himself in terms of personal images. Although he attends workshops and classes that presumably provide him with skills and techniques for solving situation-related management problems; when he looks at himself in the mirror each morning, he asks whether he looks like the kind of person who is fair, compassionate, stern, responsible, trustworthy, intelligent, and other assorted adjectives that describe the way he thinks he is or ought to be. This more or less constant self-assessment (self-talk) springs from memories of old school principals or superintendents, bosses and perhaps ministers or

fathers. The same memory bank is cluttered with images of heroes and villains he doesn't know very well. His sports heroes, movie-T.V. favorites, and political leaders head the list. In all these cases he has only the vaguest notion of what these people really do, but a very clear notion of what they are like to him as persons, and whether or not he likes them. If he does, he emulates them and if he doesn't, he tries to avoid replicating their images. And so he becomes what he is through a combination of conscious and unconscious selection processes. When he finds himself in a leadership/management role he then must hammer out the way to adjust himself (at least his perceptions of himself to the tasks at hand). If he is successful in the merger, he may be effective. If he is not, he is surely to taste the bitterness of frustration, if not failure. The problem becomes more intense as the responsibilities increase. Indeed, as the person ascends the power structure, his personal strengths and weaknesses become magnified in the communication process. He then is faced with another challenge — what to take seriously and what to ignore — for the process of magnification also involves exaggeration. The "fit-of-person-to-job" problem, therefore, figures in the statistics showing ulcers more common among those high in the power structure than those low in it. Interestingly enough, the functional competencies of high level administrative jobs are seldom the focal points of executive stress. Rather it is in the area of interpersonal confrontation (political and otherwise) where the "do or die" problems are commonly found. These "communicative disorders" are drenched in inter- as well as intrapersonal role and image clashes among the participants (combatants). "What I want to be vs. what I have to be" can, therefore, be a disconcerting dilemma for persons who see important disparities between themselves and their roles — especially at management levels. The literature of self-image psychology addresses the problem well and certain

techniques including affirmation construction as developed by the PACE (Personal and Company Effectiveness) Organization,¹² as well as biofeedback¹³ and relaxation response materials¹⁴ related to stress reduction can be helpful in converting "thermometric" behavior into constructive "thermostatic" behavior.¹⁵

Decision Making: The Acid Test of the Act/You Dichotomy

The real test in the "act vs. you" dichotomy comes at the point of decision-making. The question always arises in "chips down" circumstances, "Shall I make the decision I think my boss or constituents think I should, and maintain the integrity of the act? or should I make it the way my daimon (conscience) or the real me demands?" Apparently this daimon is beyond good and evil and fits somewhere between my Creator and the immediate incomplete me. When we heed the daimon we risk shattering the act (image), of course, — and possibly pay for it with our job or reputation and suffer the consequences of our particular kind of stress reaction. It is at this point that we are faced with determining whether we are dealing with a constructive or a destructive tension.¹⁶ In a way, this dilemma is indeed that of Hamlet as expressed in the "to be or not to be" soliloquy. Should he abandon the act in favor of the daimon? Or should he suffer and endure? We know what happened to him when he decided to follow the dictates of his conscience! His tragedy is the

¹²A Management Seminar/Consulting Firm in Los Angeles.

¹³Marvin Karlins and Lewis M. Andrews, Biofeedback, Turning on the Power of Your Mind, New York: Lippincott, 1973.

¹⁴Herbert Benson, The Relaxation Response, New York: Morrow, 1975.

¹⁵Stephen Covey has used the terms reactive and proactive behavior. They correspond to the thermometer and thermostat patterns — referring usually to emotional temperature.

¹⁶C. Hungerford, "Change and the University," Education New Mexico, 1973.

tragedy of us all. His solution was to become dysfunctional. A bitter experience we all have at times. But isn't the test of moral integrity doing ultimately what one thinks is "right" — regardless of the consequences? Be assured that I am aware that this extreme tension is not faced daily by most executives. For usually there is little opposition between the stewardship task and the character of the decision-maker if he was properly assessed by his appointers at the time of the appointment. Nevertheless, the presence of this challenge must have something to do with the relatively short tenure of administrators today. We are talking here of those infrequent but inevitable circumstances that ultimately face the administrator with important responsibilities — for which there are no simple devices or techniques that insure success, let alone survival! We are referring to those "protector of superior," "supporter of subordinate," "political congruency," roles that rack (sometimes wreck) us all at one time or another and needle our wishful assumptions about individual and organizational harmony. If I am, in my heart, opposed to bussing but my Board has mandated it (or vice versa, as is frequently the case these days) what do I do? If I wish to retain the services of one of my staff but my boss suggests he be dropped, or if I see no evidence of growth or excellence in a faculty member but his whole department or school recommends his promotion, what do I do? Whatever it is I ultimately do will have a profound effect, not only upon my institution, but upon my character (act) you see. Whatever is the nature of the mysterious process that insures my personal and professional integrity that makes me better, stronger or that ruins me is something I must find for myself and at a dear price no doubt! Perhaps Maslow's "self-actualized" person is the one for whom the "act" and the "real you" have at last converged successfully if only momentarily.

Difficult But Worthwhile

The whole summarizing message I have simply is this: that the space between the rock and the hard place is where the working administrator basically lives. Who he is and what he does is only partially his by choice. The rest is largely a matter of parameters and constraints beyond his personal control. The great secret is hidden somewhere in the philosophy of power and its connection with communication. It is not only desirable but necessary to develop a believable act that is at once audacious, honest, modern and original. Only the second rate actors sell out to the theatre. The great ones advance it and themselves in the process. The requirement draws on all that you have been and can become. It demands finding that magic balance between realism and idealism, sprinkled with persistence and good humor; knowing when to play it to the hilt and when to discard it in favor of an even more real portrayal of yourself; armed with all of the possible pertinent information apart from yourself that can be processed in time. It is an art — difficult? — not at all — just nearly impossible! Those who do not master it may be great or mediocre for awhile, but those who do, flirt with immortality.

Finally, the game is worthwhile only if it contributes to the positive growth of the individual in the singular sense and to the organization and even civilization on some grander scale. In the process, not only does the actor create the play, but the play creates the actor. When done well and properly both gain. This interactive scheme performed with excellence represents the greater drama to which Henry James refers.

Edwin Markham makes the point well another way:

"Man Making"

We are all blind until we see
 That in the human plan,
 Nothing is worth the making if
 It does not make the man.
 Why build these cities glorious
 If man unbuilt goes?
 In vain we build the work unless
 The builder also grows.

Only a point of faith would seem to make the task possible at all as I've
 tried to capture in this little "management tip" for the courageous among you:

"Maturing"

I searched
 I reached
 I grasped
 For things out there:
 But now

No search
 No reach
 No grasp
 For things apart beyond to be;
 They're here
 And have been all along
 In me.

C. Hungerford 1980